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THE FUNGUS OF THE CHESTNUT-TREE BLIGHT¹

THE disease of chestnut trees now causing serious injury in the eastern states was first noticed about the year 1904 in the vicinity of New York and is believed to be due to the growth of a hitherto unknown fungus described by Murrill in 1906 under the name of *Diaporthe parasitica*. The question naturally arises: Is the *Diaporthe* a native species of this country which had escaped the observation of mycologists, or is it an introduced exotic species? If it is a native species we must next ask how it happens that so severe an epidemic has appeared suddenly, for, if the fungus has always existed here, the important practical question is: What temporary conditions have arisen which have enabled it to increase at a rate previously unknown? Although there are some vague references to diseased chestnut trees in agricultural journals published a good many years ago, there is nothing in them to warrant us in believing that a disease at all comparable with the present chestnut epidemic ever prevailed here. One thing, at least, is certain. Had there been within the last fifty or sixty years a disease of chestnuts in the region now devastated similar to the present epidemic, there would have been left no large trees to be attacked now.

In general it may be said that when a disease due to a fungus appears suddenly and with great severity, the chances are that it is owing to the introduction of some exotic species which, although it may not

¹Paper read April 19, 1912, before the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.